

Nehemiah 5:1-19

Dealing with Strife and Division

In our study of the book of Nehemiah we have seen the people of Israel rallying under the leadership of Nehemiah – to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem

A) They have successfully faced several types of external opposition –

B) None of which stopped work on the wall even for a day.

C) Saw last week they successfully dealt with Discouragement and Fatigue

But tonight we are going to see the next thing they have to deal with is internal strife and division

A) In the midst of this great work, for a great God came a great Cry.

And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren. 2 For there were those who said, “We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live.” 3 There were also some who said, “We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine.” 4 There were also those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our lands and vineyards. 5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.”

3 FOLD PROBLEM:

#1 A Famine

#2 Heavy taxation from the King

#3 High interest payment on their loans.

Who says the Bible is not relevant.

A) It speaks here of overpopulation, famine, and high taxes.

B) Interest rates were higher than ever with no relief in sight.”

C) Heavy taxation that was coming down from the King – the Persians were ruling at this time

1) And all the regions were taxed

D) So in order to get food and to pay their taxes –

1) the people were borrowing against their farms and their homes

Now one of the things that you need to understand is that there wasn’t banks at this time –

A) So they were borrowing from the wealthy Jews – the rulers & the nobles

B) But there were two problems associated with what was happening

1) The first problem was that the rulers and the nobles were charging interest

C) The second problem was that when someone couldn’t pay back their loan

1) The lenders were taking their homes their land & in some cases their children for slaves

D) Because of this: A great work being done for a great God – came to a screeching halt because of a Great Cry!

E) Nehemiah has to put down his hard hat and turn his attention from the construction of the wall

1) to the walls and barriers of strife and division that were being put up between the people.

Now God had clearly outlined rules for lending & borrowing in his word-

A) They were allowed to lend – but they were not to charge interest

Exodus 22:25: "If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest."

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 "You shall not charge interest to your brother -- interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. 20 To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess."

Leviticus 25:35-38 'If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.³⁶ Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you.³⁷ You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit.

A) So This practice of making your brethren your slave because he couldn't pay a debt -

B) was forbidden by the Lord – **even though common in the pagan cultures.**

Leviticus 25:39-41 'And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave.⁴⁰ As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee.⁴¹ And then he shall depart from you -- he and his children with him -- and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers

C) SO God forbade his people to treat one another as slaves –

1) and he provided a way to balance the economic system

D) In the 50th year which was called the year of Jubilee –

1) All debts had to be forgiven and all land restored to its original owners, and all servants were set free.

E) So these rulers and nobles were clearly acting in a way that was contrary to God's word

1) in their **EXPLOITATION OF** their brethren

So this whole situation was causing great strife and division amongst the pp of God

A) And was threatening to kill the work that God wanted to do.

B) Strife and Division are two things that have through the ages of the church

1) Have caused the work of God to cease in a Church.

C) Strife and Division have been used to kill the work that God is seeking to do in a Family
1) OR Amongst friends.

**Christians too often forget – that in Proverbs 6:16-19 we are given a list of 6 things that the Lord hates –
7 that are an abomination.**

A) That is about as strong of language as you can get – from God – I hate these things – abomination to me

B) #7 on the list of seven abominations is **“he who sows discord among the brethren.”**

C) Discord was threatening the Work of God!

D) All too common today in our culture and in the body Christ. / Our country for sure

Too be honest I don't know how to deal with this problem on a national level.

A) We might be too far gone - ONLY JESUS HIMSELF can bring the unity that we need

B) But on a smaller and local level - our church family / our families / friendship groups

C) Great insight from Nehemiah on how to deal with strife and division

Notice Nehemiah's reaction: V.6 And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

A) Anger is not always a BAD THING –

B) Strife and Division and discord and injustice should bother us.

C) Jesus was filled with Righteous indignation – usury and injustice in the temple –

1) whip – turned tables... RAMBO

D) Injustice in our world and in the body of Christ should make us ANGRY

E) Nehemiah's first reaction is one of ANGER!

We can all learn from his 2nd reaction: V.7a After serious thought...

A) I love this: Literally **"And I consulted with myself"**

B) (v. 7). Aren't you glad that's in there? Yes, he got mad, but he thought before he spoke.

C) Nehemiah followed David's advice in Psalm 4:4 - **"Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed and be still."**

There was a time in my younger years in the Lord and in ministry - I used to react right away a lot.

A) Usually always bad

B) But I have learned the practice of consulting with myself and with the Lord

1) Sleeping on things / praying through things

C) Heart preparation is key.

1) Prepare myself / my heart before coming to work

D) Prepare my heart before going home after work

E) So Nehemiah was wise enough to pause and pray and reflect before acting.

After thinking it through Nehemiah decides to confront the Problem head on.

V.7 says he rebuked the Nobles and rulers -

A) Why did he speak to the ruling elite?

B) They were the men with the money, the ones who were exacting interest from those who didn't have it.

C) They were responsible for the oppression of the laborers.

D) This is something worth noting: Nehemiah went right to the source of the Problem.

1) He didn't go to other people to talk about what these guys were doing. -

E) Build up a case or support for his cause. - No He went directly to them.

I get so upset when someone comes to me to complain about someone else in the body -

A) The first question I ask them is this: Have you talked to that person?

B) If they haven't - end of the conversation -

1) Go talk to them - and if the problem can't be resolved then come and talk to me.

C) Now I want you to notice that Nehemiah is going to appeal to them in 5 areas.

1) Really insightful

D) These 4 areas are applicable to us in dealing with issues of strife and division we face

#1 He appeals to their family connection

V.7 After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother."

A) He uses the word, "brother" four different times in his speech.

B) When we use the phrase church family - not trying to be cute or trendy - TRUE

1) We are the body of Christ

C) Connected by blood - we are a family

D) The Bible expects us to act like a family.

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort *him* as a father, younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity. 1 Timothy 5:1-2

A) Treat older men like fathers - younger men like brothers

B) Older women as Moms - Younger as sisters

C) With all purity - absolute sincerity and love!

Paul the apostle said something haunting - always made me really think about my dealings with others.

A) 1 Corinthians 8:12 We sin against our brother - in reality we are sinning against Jesus - HIS BODY

B) That is heavy - to think about -

C) Strife and Division - Gossip - weakens the body!

1) Sinning against Jesus -

A Father came upon his sons who had been fighting w/ each other

A) He took the strongest of the boys and handed him a stick - he told him to snap it - The boy did so with contempt

B) Then he handed him two sticks & said again snap these - the boy had to strain a little but he was able to break the sticks

C) Then it was 3 sticks – the boy had to strain a little harder to snap them – Next it was 4 sticks – He had to admit defeat

1) Then the father cautioned his sons – *A house divided cannot stand*

Anyone can overthrow you one by one But Stand together in unity and your united strength will give your enemies second thoughts

Psalm 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!

So #1 Nehemiah appealed to their family connection

#2 He reminded them of God's redemptive plan: V.7b- 8 So I called a great assembly against them. 8 And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say.

He reminded them - They were a redeemed people – rescued by God –

A) Babylon – Egypt - redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb –

B) Nehemiah's question is simple – how can you put your brothers & sisters back into bondage?

C) We are a redeemed pp! – Set free – by Jesus

We in the body of Christ need to be careful that we don't put redeemed people back into bondage.

A) We can do that by laying guilt trips on them

B) Putting rules or expectations on them that go beyond what the Bible does.

C) We need to be so careful not to do that.

So #1 He appealed to their family connection

#2 He appealed to God's redemptive plan

#3 He appealed to their fear of the Lord V.9a

Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?"

A) The idea of the fear of the Lord – speaks of a Reverence and a respect for the Lord –

B) His glory – His name. – DESIRE to please HIM.

1) No way Grieve him

C) Ephesians 5:21 Submitting to one another in the fear of the Lord

1) Two people whose lives are yielded to Jesus – want to please Him.

D) Walking in the fear of the Lord means that I am Not looking at for what is best for me

1) but what is best in God's eyes

E) God's will – God's way – God's glory is going to be my MOTIVATOR.

F) Another motivator is that there is a world that doesn't know our God that is LOOKING ON.

#4 Appeal – Appeals to their witness: v.9b

A) What you are doing is a reproach a bad witness to the nations around us.

B) What these Nobles and rulers were doing was very common in the gentile nations around them.

C) Nehemiah's point – Gentiles look on and say: They are just like us – they are no different.

D) You know who applauds the loudest when churches split and Scandals happen in the church

1) The enemies of God.

Listen Church – Bigger picture: You don't exist for you – You exist for Him

A) YOU ARE Light of the world – A city set on a hill. – YOU ARE not YOU CAN BE - YOU ARE.

B) Some cities on a hill are downright UGLY

1) Others are beautiful and inviting – **which are You?**

C) THE WORLD IS WATCHING – how we deal with each other.

D) SO #4 He appealed to their witness –

After confronting them - Nehemiah doesn't stop there he proceeds to instruct them V.10-11

¹⁰ I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury! ¹¹ Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and

their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them.”

In Essence, Nehemiah says do the right thing - Restore what you have taken.

A)The reference to the hundredth part was the interest they were charging for the money

B)Notice their response V.12 **So they said, "We will restore it, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say."**

The next thing he does is hold them accountable v. 12b Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.

A)As I picture this scene in my mind, I see Nehemiah pointing to the money-lenders: *“You make a promise to these workers.”*

B)Then he looks at the priests: *“You remember their promise before God.”*

C)This was a way of saying that the promise was not just between the bankers and the builders
1)but between them and the Lord.

D)He was asking the Priest to hold them Spiritually accountable –

I want to camp out here for a minute

A)Nehemiah is asking them to not just see the situation practically or rationally - but spiritually

B)We need to do that more - Spiritual connection and covenants

C)Wedding Saturday - Not just a Covenant with one another but also with the Lord

D)Imagine if we approached more things from that perspective

E)Nehemiah concludes this meeting with a very serious visual illustration

V 13 **Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied."**

As we wrap up the chapter - Nehemiah points to his example when he became Governor

A)One of being a blessing and being willing to sacrifice for others

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor’s provisions. 15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. 16 Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.

17 And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. 18 Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor’s provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people. 19 Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

In this example – Nehemiah is reminding us of a very important Biblical truth –

A)Those who have been blessed with Resources have been blessed to be givers.

B)If God has given you means – not so you can get Richer – Blessed you to be a giver.

C)Spiritual gift – Romans 12 – Giving – Those blessed to give –

1)Make lots of money – so they can give lots of money.

D)Help others – Support the work of God – support Missions – etc

E)Great is your reward –